

CASE REPORT 8 [ID#143]

Chronic Arsenic Poisoning Due to Inhalation Exposure to Herbal Powders Burned for Spiritual Belief

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BACKGROUND: Chronic arsenic poisoning through inhalation is rarely reported in the literature.

METHODS: We present a case report of arsenic intoxication from inhaling unlabelled herbal powders being burned. Toxicological investigation confirmed the diagnosis.

RESULTS: A 39-year-old male patient developed intermittent fever episodes, loss of appetite, diffuse thickening of soles and palms, bluish discoloration of the skin of the trunk and limbs, gradual onset of tingling and numbness of distal parts of limbs and weakness of extremities after ten years being exposed to burned herbal powders. He was then admitted to University Medical Center with nausea, vomiting, and hair loss. Upon examination they found hyperpigmentation on the skin of the back, palms and soles, and Aldrich Mees' lines. High arsenic levels in urine and hair samples confirmed the arsenic poisoning. Systemic manifestations of chronic arsenic intoxication were noted such as skin involvement and peripheral neuropathy confirmed by the electromyography. He was then transferred to Taipei Veterans General Hospital for chelation therapy and further investigation.

CONCLUSION: Systemic manifestations were documented in this case following long-term exposure to arsenic-containing powders through inhaling the burned forms.